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COMMENT

Two-Tier Keir showed his true colours years ago. We should have seen the warning signs

Far-right rioters are worthy of condemnation, but accusations of two-tier policing are becoming harder to deny

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Sir Keir Starmer is quite right to condemn the violence against police officers during the appalling riots that have played out on our streets over the past week. “Our police deserve our support,” the Prime Minister has said. “Whatever the apparent cause or motivation, we make no distinction. Crime is crime.”

I totally agree. There is, however, one thing that puzzles me.

On June 6, 2020, 14 police officers were injured in London after a Black Lives Matter protest turned violent. One female officer suffered a broken collar bone, broken ribs and a collapsed lung after a protester threw a bicycle at her horse, causing it to bolt. The next day, at another Black Lives Matter protest in London, a further eight officers were injured. One was pictured with blood pouring down his face.

Then, two days after that, Sir Keir Starmer chose to publish a photo of himself, solemnly taking the knee.

Given all the injuries to police in the preceding days, did it not occur to Sir Keir that this gesture might look just a touch crass? If he believes there’s no excuse for violence, “whatever the apparent cause or motivation”, shouldn’t he have avoided this photo op? Or are violent protests after the killing of a man in the US somehow more excusable than after the killing of three girls in Britain?

Personally, I think not. But, if anyone is wondering why Elon Musk has started referring to the PM as “Two-Tier Keir”, I suspect that this may have something to do with it. The PM’s new nickname – which has also been used by Reform UK, among others – reflects

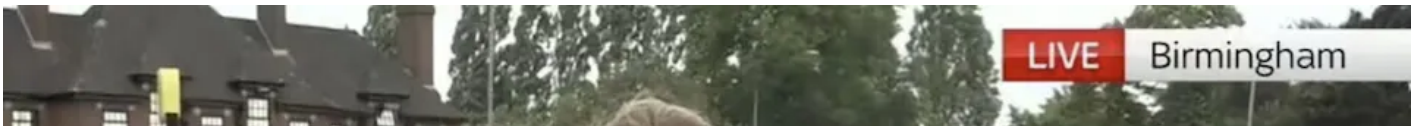
growing fears of double standards. And not just from the PM, but from police chiefs.

Sir Keir has dismissed claims that we now have a system of "two-tier policing". So has the head of the Met, Sir Mark Rowley – who, when asked by a reporter whether we're "going to end two-tier policing", simply shoved the microphone aside and strode off.

If people do believe the system is "two-tier", they can hardly be blamed. Look at the Met's soft-touch handling of the pro-Palestine marches. When marchers chanted for "jihad", the Met actually excused them, by insisting that the word has "a number of meanings". Yet, when a lone counter-protester waved a sign that read "Hamas is terrorist" (a statement that reflects UK law), he was arrested (police de-arrested and released him shortly after, claiming he had been held for his own safety).

If that wasn't "two-tier", what was it?

Equally troubling were comments this week by an officer from West Midlands Police. Sky News covered a counter-protest in Birmingham by masked men who had initially gathered outside a mosque and local Islamic Centre in the Bordesley Green area. Their reporter asked the officer why there had been such a "low-key police presence" when "an awful lot of people [were] armed with various weapons" (including a man wearing a balaclava and clutching a knife, who followed the Sky News crew after they'd finished broadcasting).



Sky News reporter Becky Johnson was recently surrounded by counter-protesters concealing their faces

The officer's reply? Apparently, the police had had "conversations" beforehand with "community leaders" in order to "understand the style of policing we needed to deliver", and "our policing response" had been "commensurate" with that. The officer added that the "communities" were "trying to make sure that [the counter-protest] was policed within themselves as well".

Sorry, what? Do all "communities" have "community leaders", who are invited to set out the "style of policing" they wish to receive? Who is my "community leader"? And are all "communities" entitled to "police within themselves"?

Language like that is bound to undermine faith in the way this unrest is being handled. And if Sir Keir fails to convince the public that it isn't "two-tier", we'll be in even graver trouble than we are now.

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